



## A new HIV/AIDS Awareness campaign for Aruba from the International Red Cross

Greg Petersen, President of the Aruba chapter of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society welcomed press on Wednesday afternoon to the ATIA building in Dakota to introduce the newest HIV/AIDS awareness campaign from these organizations.

This latest effort, which will include a media blitz of a high-impact thirty-second commercial aired for press that day, posters placed around schools, and the distribution of tee shirts, is called "Faces." The visual materials are based on the portraits of five very attractive young individuals with the names of all their past sexual partners written upon them. The motto is "no one has the truth or their (sexual) history written on their faces"; so young people should protect themselves and use a condom.

This latest effort by the Red Crescent Society is in response to the ever-increasing statistics for HIV/AIDS. Though the furor over the virus seems to have died down, a new generation faces infection, and the disease appears to be steadily on the rise, though awareness and concern has diminished amongst the populace. The largest group infected is in the age range of fifteen to forty-nine years, the most sexually active years.

New statistics for 2006 include: 39.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS, of which 17.7 million are women and 2.3 million are children. Over four million new cases of HIV/AIDS were reported in 2006, and 2.9 million died of the dreaded disease last year, which means that new cases outnumber those that are dying from HIV/AIDS, and the numbers of those infected will continue to grow.

Mr. Petersen also shared some heartbreaking statistics since the disease was first recognized in 1981. More than 25 million people have died of HIV/AIDS in the last twenty-five years, and that in Africa, the continent with the highest degree of infection, women account for 59% of the population with HIV/AIDS. Worldwide, women account for 48% of those infected, and the Caribbean is the area of the world with the second highest percentage of victims of HIV/AIDS. In developing countries, 6.8 million people are in need of life-saving drugs that treat AIDS, but only 1.65 million are receiving them.

Since 1990, the number of recorded cases of people living with HIV/AIDS has increased worldwide from approximately eight million to nearly forty million, with sixty-three percent living in Sub-Saharan Africa. This categorizes HIV/AIDS as a full-blown pandemic, insidiously working its way through the world population. The simple act of using a condom can stop the spread of this killer, and yet people still continue to ignore this fact.

Various organizations in Aruba are very active in the battle to increase awareness amongst the island youth and to educate them to the importance of practicing "safe sex," monogamy, or even abstinence. The Red Cross is now also joining in this fight with the Women's Club of Aruba, Family Planning and other worthwhile efforts. Carnival time, with its many events and party atmosphere is particularly when vigilance is necessary, and as with all youth, island children think it could never happen them.

Joining Mr. Petersen in reminding the public at this time to take care and be aware were Red Cross board members Jan van Ness, Project Coordinator Jan Leysner, and Red Cross Treasurer Franklin De Kort. Along with Mr. Petersen and two Red Cross volunteers, they displayed the new materials and added their encouragement to this important effort. Anyone wishing to support the Red Cross in this and other important work can make a donation to their Arubabank account #14.15.629.